



News Release

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Contacts: Donn Moyer, Communications Office
 Tim Church, Communications Office

360-236-4076
360-236-4077

Swine flu (H1N1) monitoring changes in Washington — new virus is common
Standard influenza monitoring strategy now in use — testing more narrowly focused

OLYMPIA — The outbreak of a new strain of swine flu (H1N1) has become widespread in the state and around the nation. Because it's now known to be in Washington, the state Department of Health is changing its monitoring strategy, focusing on hospitalized patients and fatal cases.

"The outbreak is not over, and we've learned a lot in the past couple of weeks," said Secretary of Health Mary Selecky. "We expect to see more cases of this new flu strain. It's here, and it's in most of our communities, so it's time to start looking for trends in high risk populations."

Early in the outbreak, state health officials asked health care providers and major labs to send a sample from anyone who tested positive for influenza A. Nearly 1,700 samples were sent the state Public Health Laboratories. About 25 percent of those samples have been positive for this new swine flu strain; one swine flu-related death has been reported. With the new strain now common, the state lab will no longer collect samples from all patients with influenza A. Instead, resources will be focused on looking at fatalities and hospitalizations from the new strain of swine flu.

"While most illnesses in this outbreak have been fairly mild, our public health advice remains the same," said State Health Officer Dr. Maxine Hayes. "It's important to wash your hands often whether you're sick or not, cover your cough and sneeze, and stay home if you're sick. Seasonal flu kills an estimated 36,000 people a year nationwide, so take this advice seriously."

With the change in monitoring, only the state total of hospitalizations and deaths will be posted online. The updates will be available at about 3:00 p.m. on Fridays. These are the cases that state health officials will report to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), which is moving to a similar monitoring strategy nationwide.

— More —

The new H1N1 strain of swine flu has been similar to seasonal flu in symptoms, means of spread, and response to treatment. Typically, people with existing health conditions are at greater risk of serious health effects from influenza.

Flu symptoms often include fever with cough or sore throat, muscle aches, and sometimes trouble breathing. Symptoms last several days to a week. It's important for people who are sick with flu-like symptoms to stay home and call a health care provider if they become seriously ill. Keep sick children out of school or day care until they're well. The best thing people in our state can do is to pay attention to their own health with hand washing, covering coughs and sneezes, and getting flu vaccine yearly.

Detailed information about this outbreak is available on the Department of Health [swine flu update Web site](http://www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu/default.htm) (www.doh.wa.gov/swineflu/default.htm). The agency's swine flu information telephone line, 1-888-703-4364, provides prevention advice in English and Spanish. The [federal Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](http://www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/index.htm) (www.cdc.gov/h1n1flu/index.htm) has the latest information on the national disease investigation.

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Visit the Washington Department of Health Web site at http://www.doh.wa.gov for <i>a healthy dose of information</i> .
